

SAINT NICHOLAS DAY

THE custom of hanging Christmas stockings goes back to the days of St. Nicholas, a 4th-century bishop. According to legend, St. Nicholas once helped a poor widower and his daughters by tossing gold coins through the man's window at night. The coins landed in the girls' stockings, which had been hung to dry.

Today St. Nicholas is said to visit children in Northern Europe on Dec. 6, the Orthodox Christian day for celebrating the anniversary of the saint's death. Before going to bed Dec. 5, children place their shoes outside bedroom doors, near fireplaces or some other warm location. Nicholas — patron saint of children — places treats in the shoes of good children and coal in the shoes of naughty children.

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Resolutions

DE-JUNK YOUR LIFE

CLOTHES that don't fit, outdated furniture, tacky souvenirs — everyone has stuff they no longer use or want. If "de-junking" topped your list of New Year's resolutions, consider donating your rejected goods to local thrift shops or charitable organizations.

Getting rid of clutter can lift the spirit, and also makes cleaning or moving to a new duty station easier. De-junking shouldn't be confused with reorganization, which only systemizes things you'd otherwise pitch.



To rid your home of clutter, start by thinking of 10 things to automatically toss or give away. The relief will motivate you to continue de-junking. Then divide your home into small sections for 15-minute de-junking sessions, remembering closets, cabinets and drawers.

Bathrooms can be an easy place to begin de-junking. Get rid of old razors, toothbrushes, perfume and soap samples, near-empty bottles, etc.

Children's rooms may be the hardest place to de-junk because kids accumulate new toys and clothes at nearly every age. Make a habit of donating one or two items for every new one the child gets.



Think about things you tend to collect for future use — paper and plastic bags, pens, plastic containers, boxes, extension cords, magazines, etc. Consider how many extras you really need to have on hand and get rid of the rest.



If you are emotionally attached to an item, consider making something useful out of it.

Check local libraries to see if they accept donated books, CDs and tapes.



Go to www.nonprofit.about.com for information on nonprofit agencies that accept donations.

HIT THE SLOPES ►

WHETHER you travel on skis or by snowboard this winter, check your local Outdoor Recreation Center for gear, lessons and trips at discount prices.

Slopes located near military installations include the Birch Hill Ski and Snowboard Area at Fort Wainwright, Alaska; Ravenwood Ski Lodge at Eilson Air Force Base, Ala.; Rocky Mountain Blue at Keystone, Colo.; and Lake Tahoe Coast Guard Recreation Facility in Tahoe City, Calif.

Soldiers in Germany can plan ski vacations for the entire family in Garmisch. Bordering Switzerland and Austria, the area boasts some of the most challenging slopes and also offers instruction for beginners. Non-skiers can check out the Herrenchiemsee Castle, Salzburg or Munich.



Inquire at local Outdoor Recreation Centers or go to www.AFRCEurope.com.



GO ARMY! GO ARMY! GO ARMY! GO! GO ARMY! GO ARMY! GO ARMY! GO!

CATCH the 2003 Army-Navy Football game Dec. 6 at 4:10 p.m. on CBS. The game will take place at the new Lincoln Financial Field in Philadelphia, Pa.



Tickets are available through the Army "A" Club or through season-ticket packages. Go to www.goarmysports.com for more information.

PICKING THE PERFECT CELL-PHONE PLAN

BUYING a new cell phone this Christmas? Giving one as a gift? A sleek, stylish look may attract consumers to a particular phone, but the cost of joining the wireless-phone world is determined by the service provider and plan a prospective customer selects.

The most important step in shopping for cell-phone service is choosing a plan that suits your needs. First consider how many

minutes you'll need per month. Then decide whether a local, regional or national plan will best serve you. Local plans limit calls to a small area and are usually least expensive. Regional plans cover a multi-state area. National plans are limited only by country, and are often most expensive.

Buyers should query individual carriers about long-distance and roaming charges. New users may

want to opt for a month-to-month rather than yearly contract so they have the freedom to switch plans.

Cell phones can offer a variety of options. There's voicemail, caller ID, call forwarding, call waiting, paging/text messaging, e-mail and wireless Web access. Companies frequently change features to stay competitive, so call each individually to see if new options or lower prices are available.

